

# ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

## Proposal to Nominate

### Mort's Dock, Birchgrove

#### as an Item of Engineering Heritage Interest

<b>Item Name:</b>	<b>Mort's Dock, Birchgrove</b>
<b>Other/Former Names:</b>	NA
<b>Locality:</b>	Birchgrove, Sydney
<b>Address:</b>	Thames, Mort, College, McKell, Cameron, and Yeend Streets, Balmain 2041
<b>Co-ordinates</b>	Lat: -33.8493021, Lon: 151.1818463
<b>Current Owner:</b>	Inner West Municipal Council.
<b>Original Owner:</b>	NA
<b>Current use:</b>	Open space (park) for recreation, school/scout activities and special events.
<b>Former use:</b>	Shipbuilding, ship repairs, container facility, manufacturing/engineering works.
<b>Proposed use:</b>	Open space (park) for recreation, school/scout activities and special events.
<b>Item Condition:</b>	Dock has been filled with the outline delineated by a sandstone kerb, and with the entry sealed by the dock's sunken and filled caisson.
<b>Designer:</b>	<p>Thomas Sutcliffe Mort.</p> <p>Mort arrived in Australia in February 1838. He was employed as a clerk and gained experience in international and local commerce.</p> <p>In 1843, he set up business as an auctioneer and over time specialised in the auctioning of wool. This business developed into Goldsborough Mort, wool-brokers.</p> <p>Mort was a great entrepreneur and was associated with the Australian Mutual Provident Society, sugar cane growing at Moreton Bay, was a member of the Sydney Exchange Company, a director of the Sydney Railway Company, was involved in providing gold mining venture capital, gold escorting, and he even invested in Henry Parkes newspaper, <i>Empire</i>. In March 1855 Mort's dry dock at Waterview Bay (Balmain) opened for business;</p> <p>In the 1860s he acquired a property at Bodalla primarily for beef and dairy cattle. From this he became very interested in providing refrigeration, not only for the transportation of his dairy products to Australian markets, but also for use in ships to service the overseas frozen-meat trade. In partnership with E.D. Nicolle, the company developed commercially viable systems for a domestic chilling works at Bowenfels in the Blue Mountains, a cold store at Darling Harbour, milk depots in the Southern Highlands and refrigerated railway vans for meat and milk. The company never developed the frozen meat export business.</p> <p>Mort died on 9 May 1878 from pleuro-pneumonia at Bodalla, where he was buried.</p>

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	As a sign of the respect in which Thomas Mort was held, his statue was unveiled in Macquarie Place in 1883.		
<b>Builder:</b>	Private labour		
<b>Started:</b>	1853	<b>Completed:</b>	1855
<b>History:</b>	<p>In 1853 Captain Thomas Rowntree purchased land fronting Waterview Bay (later becoming Mort Bay), recognising it as a prime location for a patent slip. To finance his venture, Rowntree sold his ship the 'Lizzie Webber' and in doing so, met Auctioneer, Thomas Sutcliffe Mort.</p> <p>Mort recognised the need for Sydney to provide docking facilities for ships needing repairs in the Colony as at that time, there were no such facilities south of Bombay (modern Mumbai), India; for this the Waterview Bay location was ideal.</p> <p>Accordingly, Rowntree and Mort formed the Waterview Bay Dry Dock Company (later Mort's Dock &amp; Engineering Company) in 1853, and built Australia's first dry dock and patent slip on the site. The dock was operational by 1855 one year before Fitzroy Dock at Cockatoo Island. The company soon became the largest private employer in the colony, a cornerstone of the union movement and the birthplace of the Australian Labour Party (then the Labour Electoral League, later the Political Labour League), founded in 1891 by Balmain Unionists at the dock who fielded four candidates in the State elections.</p> <p>Having bought a copper mine in Queensland and a coal mine in Newcastle, Mort added an iron and brass foundry, boiler-making facilities and a patent slip at Balmain.</p> <p>Management of the whole facility was taken over by J.P. Franki in 1867 and there was a move to more general engineering which included building of locomotives (the first locally-produced locomotive was assembled in 1870), ships and machinery, ironwork for bridges, building components for mining and resource development and the manufacture of welded steel pipe for the Sydney Water Board.</p> <p>The Company took over the partially completed Woolwich Dock and that facility was opened in 1901</p> <p>By 1917 Mort's Dock had built 39 steamships, 7 Manly ferries, pumping engines for the Waverley and Crown Street reservoirs and the ironwork for the Sydney GPO. In the interwar period, an iron foundry was constructed, a slipway and floating dock purchased, and the company had a virtual monopoly on local industry.</p> <p>The outbreak of World War II proved to be a boom time for Mort's Dock. The 1920s and 1930s had seen a decline in the Royal Australian Navy with few vessels constructed and older ships sold off or scrapped. Japan's entry into the war led to a sudden demand for coastal protection and increased offensive power in the Pacific Ocean. Between 1940 and 1945, Mort's Dock constructed 14 of the 60 Bathurst class Corvettes built in Australia, 4 of the 12 River Class frigates, and a 1000 ton capacity floating dock.</p> <p>The dock's death knell was the introduction of container shipping in the 1960s. The company fell into liquidation in 1959. The site was purchased by ANL in 1960, its buildings were demolished and the dock was filled-in for new wharves in 1965, to create its newest container facility.</p> <p>The backfill preserved the dry dock and other in situ remains providing a</p>		

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	<p>high archaeological potential and fabric integrity</p> <p>The first container ship berthed there in 1969, but the site was redundant ten years later, with the container port moving to Botany Bay. <i>(This history draws upon and reproduces parts of the entry in the NSW State Heritage Register, and 'Thomas Mort's Docks' by Gregory Blaxell, Afloat Magazine, February 2008).</i></p>
<b>Description:</b>	Filled dock (in a park) with outline delineated by sandstone kerb, and with entry sealed by the sunken and filled caisson. A concrete container wharf is along the water frontage.
<b>Significance:</b>	<p>The site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has an historical association with Thomas Rowntree, and Thomas Sutcliffe Mort;</li> <li>• represents significant technical achievement in the building of the first dry dock in the colony;</li> <li>• was responsible for a number of engineering/technical innovations including the alleged development of shipboard refrigerated transport;</li> <li>• is socially and culturally significant as the largest private enterprise in the colony at the time, and is unique for its contribution to the trade union movement with the establishment of the Ship Painters and Dockers Union in 1872, and the formation of what is now, the Australian Labour Party 1891.</li> <li>• backfill-preserved remains of the dock and other in situ remains, provide a high archaeological potential;</li> <li>• is representative of shipbuilding, ship repair, engineering and manufacturing works of that period, of the development of the colony and of Australia as a maritime nation.</li> </ul>
<b>Webpage Summary:</b>	<p>Thomas Sutcliffe Mort and Captain Thomas Rowntree formed the Waterview Bay Dry Dock Company (later Mort's Dock &amp; Engineering Company) in 1853 and built Australia's first dry dock and patent slip, fronting Waterview Bay, later named Mort Bay. The dock was operational by 1855 and the company soon became the largest private employer in the colony, a cornerstone of the union movement and the birthplace of the Australian Labour Party.</p> <p>Management of the whole facility was taken over by J.P. Franki in 1867 and there was a move to more general engineering which included building of locomotives, ships and machinery, ironwork for bridges, building components for mining and resource development and the manufacture of welded steel pipe for the Sydney Water Board.</p> <p>By 1917 Mort's Dock had built 39 steamships, 7 Manly ferries, pumping engines for the Waverley and Crown Street reservoirs and the ironwork for the Sydney GPO. In the interwar period an iron foundry was constructed, a slipway and floating dock purchased, and it had a virtual monopoly on local industry.</p> <p>Between 1940 and 1945 - during World War II, Mort's Dock constructed 14 of the 60 Bathurst class Corvettes built in Australia, 4 of the 12 River Class frigates, and a 1000-ton capacity floating dock.</p> <p>With the introduction of container shipping the company fell into liquidation in 1959. The site was purchased by ANL in 1960, its buildings were demolished, and the dock filled in for new wharves in 1965, to create a container facility. The backfill preserved the dry dock and other in situ remains, providing a high archaeological potential and fabric integrity.</p>

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<b>Engineering Theme:</b>	Transport, Sea, Docks		
<b>Heritage Listing:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Heritage Register. Listing No. 01854, 14/01/2011</li> <li>• National Trust of Australia register, 9/10/1998</li> <li>• Register of the National Estate, 31/01/1983</li> <li>• State Environmental Planning Policy. <i>Site and Remains of former Mort's Dock Site</i>, No. 12, 13/10/2010.</li> </ul>		
<b>References/Sources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Heritage Register</li> <li>• <i>Thomas Mort's Docks</i> by Gregory Blaxell, Afloat Magazine, February 2008.</li> <li>• Dictionary of Sydney</li> <li>• Australian Dictionary of Biography.</li> </ul>		
<b>Nominated by:</b>	Michael Clarke		
<b>Contact Ph. &amp; Email:</b>	0431 887 001	nardiclarke@gmail.com	
<b>EHA Branch:</b>	Sydney	<b>Nomination Date:</b>	5 February 2024

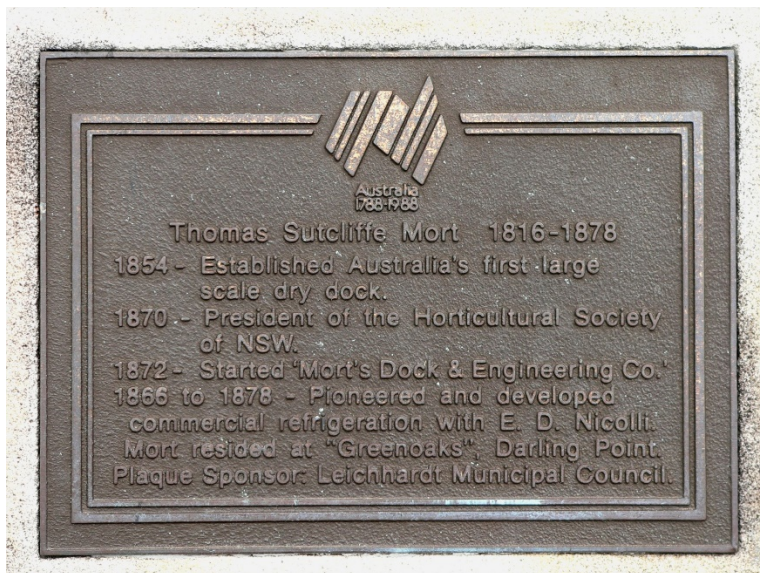


*Statue of Mort, Macquarie Place*

## ENGINEERING HERITAGE RECOGNITION PROGRAM



*Mort Bay container terminal.*



*Morts Dock Bicentenary plaque.*



*Morts Dock, caisson and outline of dock.*

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Morts Dock, caisson and outline of dock.



Morts Dock, Corvette plaque.



Morts Dock Office and Sawmill

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